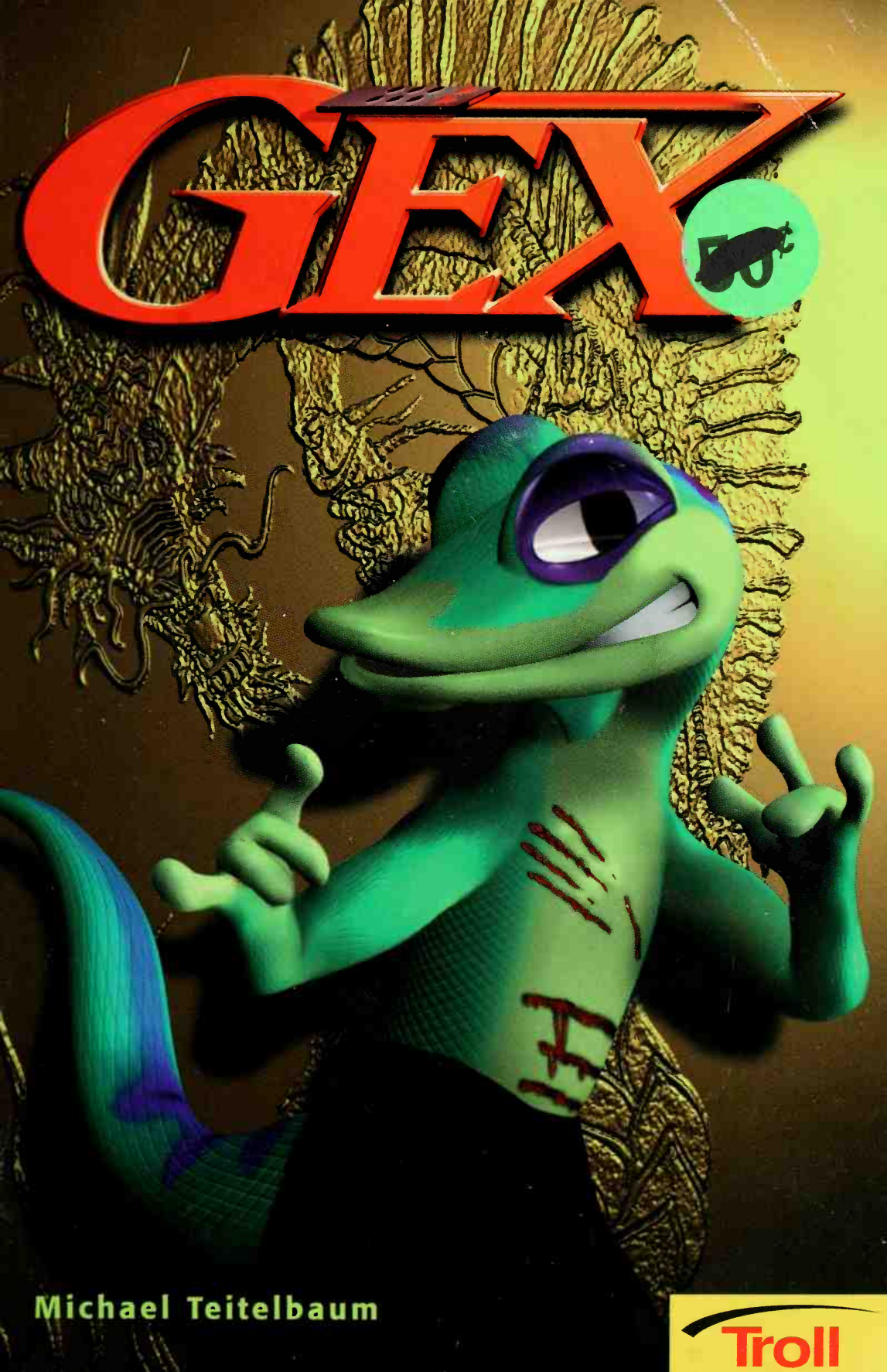

Michael Teitelbaum

Troll

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GEX™

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Special thanks to Rand Marlis and Ruth Adams.

A Creative Media Applications Production

Art Direction by Fabia Wargin Design

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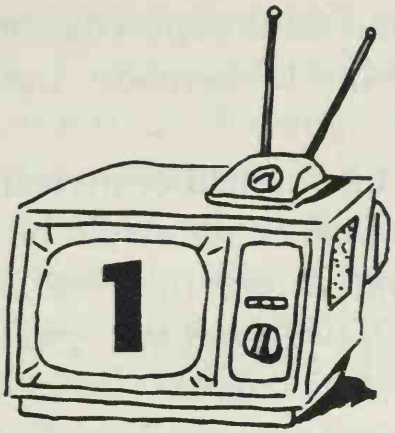


We go back a long way, Rez and I.

Oh, by the way, I'm GEX--short for Gecko Extraordinaire. Anyway, I've been fighting Rez for a long time (since way before I saw the report on the TV news telling me that Rez had kidnapped my beautiful partner, Agent Xtra, and pulled her into the Media Dimension). I'm going to have to go back there to rescue her.

But I get ahead of myself.

This will be my third trip into the Media Dimension. I just barely survived the first two tours, and now I've got to go back in. It's gonna be déjà-ouch all over again! Good thing I've got

my James Bond super-spy tux, because believe me—in the Media Dimension, I get both shaken *and* stirred.

But again, I get ahead of myself.

I guess the best thing would be for me to start at the beginning. A long time ago, in a dimension far, far away . . . *Luke, I am your gecko!*

Wrong story. Take two.

. . . . . .

It all began a few years back. I was living the good life in Hawaii, like any self-respecting gecko. My mom took care of my brothers and sisters and me. My dad was doing research for NASA. You might say he was a regular space lizard, blasting off in rockets to test the effects of living in space.

As for me, my days were filled with beach parties with my friends, surfing the big waves, and playing the ukulele. Not a bad gig, huh? I was living the carefree life, happy as a gecko could be.

And that's when it happened. My dad, along with ten other brave souls, had volunteered for an important NASA test mission, to see if it was possible to eat tapioca pudding in the zero gravity of space. I'll never forget the day Mom got the phone call from NASA. The rocket containing Dad and the other volunteers had exploded on the launch pad. There were no survivors—just gallons of burnt tapioca.

My family was shattered, and I've never been the same since. I closed down, bottling up my grief. I took comfort in the only thing that had always provided me with relief—TV.

In my time of need, all my friends were there. Breakfast with the Ninja Turtles, lunch and a song with the Partridge Family, a quick bionic pick-me-up from the Six Million Dollar Man, and dinner with Indiana Jones. My old pals were always ready to take my mind off my troubles.

But my mom began to worry—mothers are good at that kind of thing—and she started doing all kinds of weird stuff. First, she packed up the family and moved us from Hawaii to California. Mom called it a new beginning. Whatever. I could watch TV just as comfortably from a couch in Encino as from a club chair on Maui—same old, same old.

But then she really did it. I came down one morning, ready to click on the tube and have breakfast with Bugs and Daffy, when I noticed that something was missing from the living room—not to mention my life. The TV! Mom had given the set away. "Go catch some flies, walk up some walls—anything a normal gecko does," she said. "Just stop watching TV all the time!"

I was outraged. The one thing that had given my life meaning was gone, heartlessly torn from my home. And to think my mom was responsible!

I stormed out the front door, vowing that I would never set foot inside that TV-less house again. Mom chased after me, begging me to stay, but it was too late. My mind was made up. I was outta there!

The next few months were a blur. I started hanging around with some local punks. We'd skateboard to the mall, then hang out in the comic book shop until the manager of the joint kicked us out. I blasted music through my headphones and tuned out the world in a whole new way. I hated this place. I hated myself. I missed my TV.

During this time, I slept in my friend's garage and picked up some pocket money doing odd jobs around the neighborhood. My life had become one long, aimless haze. And it seemed it would be that way forever.

But once again, fate stepped in and shook up my world. Mom tracked me down with some amazing news. It seems that my Uncle Charlie had died and left us a lot of money. I mean, *a lot* of money. Overnight, we were rich!

The members of my family all reacted differently to suddenly having tons of money. My mom bought NASA, fired everyone to get revenge for my dad's death, then turned Mission Control into a theme restaurant. My brothers and sisters pooled their money and bought Australia.

As for me—well, I moved back to my beloved Hawaii and bought the biggest house on Maui. Then I filled it with the world's largest TV set and enough food to last me for decades. I was fully prepared to spend the rest of my life doing exactly what I liked best—watching TV.

But that fickle finger of fate pointed me in another direction once again. I was home one day, flipping through the channels with my remote and munching on a big bowlful of flies—a gecko's favorite snack. A fly began buzzing around my head. I flicked my tongue and swallowed it. Nothing unusual about a gecko eating a fly, right? Only this was no ordinary fly. It was a radio transmitter that worked as a homing device!

My remote control suddenly jammed. My giant TV screen went blank. Then, without warning, a huge hand reached out of the screen, grabbed me by the neck, and *zap!*

Just like that I was yanked through my TV into this bizarre and totally cool place known as the Media Dimension. You see, in the Media Dimension, TV rules! Now, you might think that it sounds like the perfect place for a tubehead like me. But what I failed to mention is that the cold, powerful claw that pulled me into this crazy dimension belonged to a guy named Rez.

Rez ruled the Media Dimension. In fact, his ultimate plan was to take control of all TV channels everywhere. Of course I didn't know that at the time. All I knew was that this mean-looking dude had pulled me into the Media Dimension to bronze me and turn me into a new network mascot!

I ran as fast as my four legs could take me, through a world of colorful shapes, platforms, mazes, catwalks, ramps, and levels. I was inside a world made of old TV shows! It might sound strange to you, but believe me, being there was about as strange as it gets.

I raced along a ramp that seemed to narrow as I moved forward. Then I saw it—at the end of the ramp sat a TV. Something inside me (maybe it was that transmitter) said to keep running, so I did. I ran right into the TV!

Crash! I broke through the screen and was instantly transported to one of the many worlds that made up the Media Dimension—Cartoon World.

The TV acted as an exit from one world and a portal into another! I remember thinking. *I'll have to keep that in mind!*

Cartoon World was like being trapped inside every cartoon I'd ever seen, and take my word for it, I've seen a million of them. I dashed down an

ordinary-looking cartoon street. Suddenly a huge safe plummeted from the top floor of a building and just missed my head!

A cat and mouse super-hero team raced over to me. They looked more like they were fighting to still fit into their costumes than like they were ready to battle evil super-villains. They handed me a bouquet of flowers. "Holy chrysanthemum, Batman!" I shrieked. Then the two out-of-work, out-of-shape heroes leaped into their rodent-mobile and zoomed away—which is when the bouquet of flowers exploded. My head spun around and around, then came to rest facing backward. I twisted it back to its forward position and continued on my way.

I passed a pay phone that was ringing. When I picked it up and said "Hello?" a foot kicked through the phone line. The kick knocked me right into another TV, transporting me to Graveyard World!

Ever wonder what happens to old black-and-white monster movies? You know, movies like *Frankenstein and Dracula Meet the Giant Tomatoes from Jupiter*? Well, they end up in Graveyard World. As I shuffled through a foggy graveyard at midnight, an army of walking zombies marched toward me. Talk about a bunch of stiffs! I scrambled up a nearby mausoleum using my suction-cup feet and leaped over their heads—

—only to land in front of a drooling, growling maniac wearing a hockey mask and wielding a large knife. "Quarter pound of Swiss cheese and a hat trick there, buddy," I said as the mad slasher raised his knife and stepped toward me. I dove behind a headstone and crashed right into the TV leading out of Graveyard World.

Splash! I landed in a pot of steaming water. I was now in the middle of a cannibal feast in Jungle World! Usually when someone says, "I'd like to have you for dinner," they don't mean *you're* gonna be the main course! I jumped from the pot and took off through the thick jungle underbrush. The cannibals chased me, poking their sharp spears at my heels. I took a right at a fallen log and found myself face-to-face with a ferocious tiger! "Hi! I'm here for the Frosted Flakes interview," I said. He showed his teeth.

The cannibals charged from behind me, and the tiger charged from the front. I looked up and saw a tree branch about twenty feet above my head. *Thwap!* I shot my tongue into the air, wrapped it around the branch, and pulled myself up to safety—or so I thought. What did I find way up in the tree? *Smash!* You guessed it—another TV.

This one led to Kung Fu World, where I was instantly surrounded by a team of six deadly ninjas. "Will Chuck Norris please report to the

front desk?" I said. "Paging Jean-Claude Van Damme!" The ninjas obviously weren't up on their kung fu movies. They began closing their circle tighter and tighter around me. Then an amazing thing happened, something that would change my life—or at least save it countless times over the next few years.

I instinctively whipped my tail at the ninjas in a move I came to call my "roundhouse tail attack." *Whup! Whap! Boof!* One by one, I polished off all six ninjas. *Quite the weapon, Gexie, old boy,* I thought when the last ninja had dropped. That was when two sumo wrestlers ran at me from opposite directions.

"I have two words you guys should add to your vocabulary," I said. *"Salad bar!"* I knew that if I went to take one of the big boys out with my roundhouse tail attack, the other would crush me like a pancake. So rather than whip my tail at one wrestler or the other, I split the difference and slammed it right in between them. This move, which I named the "tail slam" (real clever, I know, but Goldberg's Jackhammer was already copyrighted), sent shock waves through the ground, tumbling both tubbies away. Of course, the shock wave also caused a TV to crash down on my head, sending me to—

—Rez's Nerve Center. Finally I was face-to-face with the twisted, evil ruler of the Media Dimension in his own home base. This was a world beyond insanity. Alien, high-tech circuitry pulsed with waves of electric force. Energy flowed like liquid and crackled like static.

"At last, gecko, I have you where I want you," snarled Rez. There was something strangely familiar about his voice, but I couldn't quite place it. "Now you will become my new network mascot!"

I turned and stared at Rez. His metal body looked as if it had been thrown together by a boiler explosion. He had long, pointy teeth of sharp metal, and his piercing yellow eyes burned with a sickly glow that felt as if it was searing right through me. Wires and tubes connected the back of his head to his body, and the hood ornament on his skull ran from the back of his neck to his forehead. Lights flashed ominously from his head and body. His hands ended in shiny gold claws, and flames leaped from his torso. I may have already mentioned that this was one mean-looking dude!

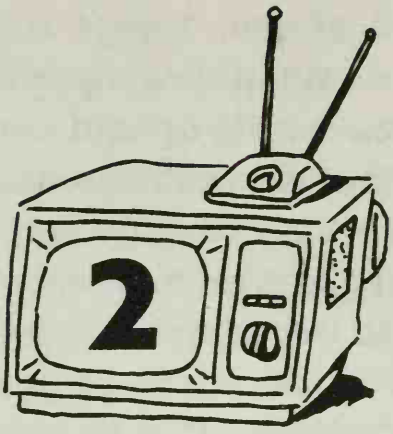
"It's tail time!" I shouted. *Hmm. Pretty good catch phrase,* I thought. *I'll have to remember to copyright it.* I whipped my tail at him, but he was quick. He jumped up and avoided its powerful impact.

Rez lunged at me. I shot my tongue to a conduit above us and pulled myself out of the way just in time. Rez sprang up and joined me on the thin wire fifty feet above the ground.

That's when I saw the TV set I hoped would lead me out of the Media Dimension. Rez stood between me and freedom. I shot my tongue out in a move I came to call my "gelatinous tongue lash" (fancier than "tail slam," I know). A stream of green slime flew from my mouth and hit Rez square in his steel-belted chest, knocking him down from the conduit. *I didn't know I could do that,* I thought. *Being in the Media Dimension gives me some interesting powers!*

"David—one! Goliath—nothing!" I yelled as I raced along the conduit on my suction-cup feet. "I am outta here!" I dove into the TV, and *wham!* I was free. I landed in my own living room. When I crashed to the floor, the transmitter fly popped out of my mouth and disappeared. I turned around and looked back at the screen of my huge TV. My favorite James Bond movie was playing. I picked up the remote, flopped onto the couch, and shoved a handful of flies into my mouth. All was right with the world again.

For the moment.



Two peaceful years passed.

I did nothing but sit in front of the tube, eat junk food, and take comfort in daily visits from my big-screen buddies. I'd start my day with a cup of coffee and *Kung Fu Theater,* followed by a doughnut and my favorite cartoons. Then came a bag of chips and a visit to *Her Majesty's Secret Service.* For two years, I hardly budged.

But then things got really interesting.

One day—which started off like any other day—two big goons in black suits and sunglasses burst into my house. I told them right away that

the *Men in Black* sequel had already been cast. But they flashed their badges at me, saying that they worked for a secret government agency and needed my help. It seemed that Rez was on the move again, trying to take over all the TV channels in the world. They said that because I had taken care of Rez once already, I was the perfect gecko for the job. They wanted me to go back into the Media Dimension and stop Rez again.

I told them to buzz off. My favorite episode of *I Love Lucy* was coming on, and it was time for them to leave. "Go find some other guy to save the day," I said. That's when they whacked me over the head with a crowbar.

Everything went black. When I woke up, I was in an interrogation room with a bright light shining in my eyes. Again they asked me to help them by going after Rez, and again I said no.

That's when they shoved the briefcase full of cash under my nose.

"What is it exactly you want me to do?" I asked, counting the bills. Hey, everyone's got his price. As a matter of fact, the goons threw in a really spiffy secret-agent tuxedo. Fits me like a four-fingered glove.

They explained that my mission was simple—save television and make Rez "disappear."

As I left the building, a beautiful secret agent named Agent Xtra introduced herself to me. "Welcome to the team, Gexie," she said.

So not all the agents who work for this secret government agency are big, ugly goons, I thought.

"Thanks for helping to stop Rez," Agent Xtra added. "I love television, too." Then she giggled and walked away.

I could tell right away that Xtra and I were going to be good friends.

A big government limo drove me home. The agents had already programmed my TV to work as a doorway into the Media Dimension. They even had set me up with a secret cave to use as a base of operations once I got there.

"Lock and load, little lizard!" I shouted as I dove through my TV screen and re-entered the Media Dimension. "It's tail time!"

I landed on the Pre-History Channel—right on the head of a T. Rex. I suppose in some weird genetic way we're related, but I wasn't going to stick around to compare family photos. I had to find Rez and stop him from taking over TV. That was my goal. The government goons had told me that Rez's Nerve Center had been expanded into an entire city in the Media Dimension. The city was called Rezopolis. But how was I supposed to get there? Would the first TV I

found lead me right to Rez, or would I have to dance my way through a pile of reruns before I got to the big enchilada himself?

While these questions raced through my mind, the giant T. Rex casually shook his head, sending me flying into a TV.

Crash! I landed in Circuit Central—a world of old sci-fi shows—right in the captain's seat on the bridge of the starship *Win-A-Prize.* We were under attack from an alien race known as the Re-rons. Suddenly a troop of Re-ron warriors materialized on the bridge. I leaped into action.

"It's tail time!" I shouted as I struck with my roundhouse tail attack. *Whip! Whip! Whip!* I slammed into the dreaded Re-rons, shattering their bodies into a million scattered electrons and diminishing their dreams of conquest, all in one swift stroke. Not bad for a lazy lizard.

"You're in command, Mr. Schlock," I told my first officer. "I'm outta here!" Then I jumped into the ship's main viewscreen, hoping to land in Rezopolis. Again, I was out of luck.

Gong! I landed in the middle of *Kung Fu Theater.* I was staring right into the ugly mug of a disgusting half-pig, half-cow called Moo Shu Pork.

I took a kung fu stance. (Hey, I've seen enough movies to fake it!) Then I looked down and saw that I was now clad in a bright red kung fu outfit,

complete with nunchucks and a Chinese takeout box—in case I got hungry after my fight.

"Grand Master GEX to show you what I'm made of, Moo Shu," I said.

Moo Shu Pork lunged at me with a nasty looking cattle prod. I swiftly countered with my nunchucks, grabbing the prod and flinging it.

"Just getting my kicks, darling," I said, lashing out with a powerful kung fu kick that sent Moo Shu Pork flying back into the takeout kitchen. So much for him.

After a quick snack, I spotted a TV. There on the screen, glaring and taunting me, was an image of Rez. At that moment, I knew my next stop would be my last. I wolfed down the final piece of my General Chang's chicken and dove into the TV screen.

Sure enough, I found myself in Rezopolis. It was unlike any place I'd ever seen. The sprawling city flickered with blue, static-filled light, like a TV set trying to pull in a weak signal. Electrical impulses whizzed through the air like urgent messengers. The place was alive with power.

Before I could see him, I caught a whiff of Rez.

I spun around, and there he was, breathing all over me. "Hi!" I said. "I'm here about the receptionist position. I hear your reception is bad. Not to mention your breath!"

"You have come to me, GEX," hissed a crackling electric voice.

"Actually, I've come to pulverize you," I announced. "Now sit down and beg like a dog!"

Rez slammed me with a right-handed swipe that sent me flying into the side of a shimmering blue building. He didn't waste a second, firing a missile that came straight toward me. I jumped out of the way, just in time. The missile destroyed the building, which winked out like a TV set going off.

"All right, Rezzie, old boy," I yelled. "It's tail time!" I charged straight at him. When I was about two feet away, I whipped my body around and smashed him with a roundhouse tail attack.

Rez went zooming through the air and crashed into a TV screen—where he was trapped inside.

"Now I can see you perfectly!" I said as Rez struggled unsuccessfully to escape from the TV. "Your reception cleared right up!"

"Listen to me, GEX," he said, his hands pressed against the inside of the screen. "I have something to tell you."

"I'm listening," I said. "What's the hurry? You're not going anywhere."

"GEX," Rez began. "I am your father!"

Now *that* I was not expecting! "But Obi-Wan—I mean Mom—told me you were dead!" I replied, hiding my shock.

"No, I wasn't killed in that NASA accident," Rez explained. "I was just hideously deformed, and it made me hateful. I will rule all of TV, and you won't stop me!"

It was then that I spied the remote control sitting on top of the TV. I grabbed it and aimed it at the set.

"No, don't turn it off!" Rez pleaded.

"Good-bye, Dad," I said. "See you in reruns." Then I used the remote to turn off the TV.

The image of Rez disappeared, and everything went black. When the lights came back on, I was out of the Media Dimension, back in my living room.

. . . . . .

As I sorted through the shock of learning that Rez was really my father, I thought I would never see him again. That was six months ago. Boy, was I wrong.

This morning, right there on the TV news, was the report that my good friend Agent Xtra had been kidnapped by Rez. So now I had to head back into the Media Dimension.

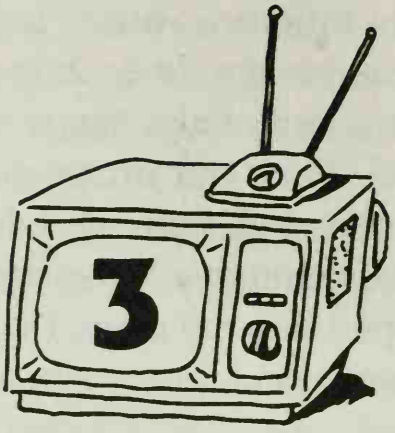
"Well, what are you waiting for?" a familiar voice cried from my giant TV.

I looked at the screen. There was Xtra, bigger than life. "Rez is holding me in his secret space station," she explained. "You're going to have to go

through a lot of different worlds to find this place, but, Gexie, you're my only hope." Her image began to flicker and fade. "Start in your secret cave," she cried. Then her image disappeared.

I quickly changed into my ultra-cool secret-agent tux. "It's déjà-ouch all over again," I shouted.

Then I leaped into my giant TV screen, back to the Media Dimension.



The previous trips from our world into the Media Dimension were like taking a ride on the world's biggest roller coaster, backward, hanging upside down by your toes, blindfolded, after eating about four pounds of flies. In other words, they made me nauseous.

Well, this trip was no different.

"Here I am to save the day!" I sang out as I landed on my tail.

I looked around and saw that I was in the secret cave headquarters the government agents had set up for me in the Media Dimension. The

first thing I realized was that my secret cave apparently was not so secret anymore. Someone had trashed my hideout. I'll give you three guesses who it was, and the first two don't count! The TV sets in the cave were smashed to bits, one huge cavern had collapsed from an explosion, my Media Dimension subscription to *TV Guide* had been allowed to expire, and my six-month supply of dried flies had been stolen. Looked like old Rez had been busy, and I don't mean trying to patch things up with his long-lost son.

On the ground, among the rubble of my hideout, I spied a remote control. I never thought it would still be working, but when I pushed the power button, a TV wedged up in the ceiling flashed on. It was the one set Rez hadn't destroyed, and it was obviously the way into the next world of the Media Dimension. I jumped straight up and vanished into the screen.

Bam! Boom! Budda-budda-budda! I landed on a cold metal floor. Darkness surrounded me. Outside, I could hear the sounds of exploding grenades and machine guns. I reached up and pushed my finger against the steel helmet resting on my head. "This helmet is gonna muss up my hair!" I shouted, realizing that no one could hear me.

Ching! Ching! Chank! The sounds of bullets bouncing off metal let me know where I was . . .

inside a tank, tank goodness. If not for this rolling metal jacket, I'd have had as many holes in me as the plot of *Independence Day!*

Private GEX reporting for duty. I looked down at myself and saw that in addition to the helmet, I was outfitted in full army fatigues. Borrrrring! When they say olive drab, they mean drab! I glanced at the high, tightly laced, standard black boots. *Do these boots come in red?* I thought. *It's one of my best colors! And could they lace these things any tighter? Man, nothing like army clothes for total comfort. Actually, what this uniform needs is some accessories—a handbag, some shiny buttons, maybe a lovely bow?* A grenade explosion snapped me out of my fashion nightmare and brought me back to my dire situation.

I switched on the tank's viewscreen and assessed my position. I was on a huge battlefield. Three enemy tanks approached from the left, two more from the right. *Where's the gas pedal on this thing?* I wondered as I rumbled along the bumpy ground. *And why is it that Bond gets all the fast cars, not me?*

An enemy plane dropped a bomb that landed only a few feet in front of me. Shrapnel and rocks bounced off the tank. I kept rumbling forward. *On the other hand, I can see the advantage of this rolling tin can.* Another bomb exploded nearby, even

louder than the first one. *Note to self: Don't get killed in a big, loud war!*

Then the thought hit me—*I'm a resourceful gecko. I've made it through the bizarre worlds of the Media Dimension before. This World War II World isn't all that different from some of the other worlds I've encountered. Besides, I've watched enough old war movies to know the score.* I had to do what any self-respecting gecko would do—*fight back!*

I studied the tank's dashboard as the explosions continued all around me. The switches were labeled *load, lock, target,* and *fire.* "I can do that! It's time to lock and load, little lizard!"

I pressed the *load* button and heard a shell slip into the tank's main gun. Then I pressed *lock,* and gears started turning. A light above the *fire* button flashed. I pressed the *target* button and peered into the tank's sighting periscope. The nearest enemy tank was lined up in my cross-hairs. "It's tank time!" I shouted as I fired a round.

I watched in glee as the shell exploded from my tank's main gun and blew up the enemy tank. "I came, I saw, I kicked some World War II butt!"

Of course, as a famous space smuggler once said to a young Jedi-to-be, "Don't get cocky, kid!" I felt that was good advice. As I peered through the sighting mechanism, I saw the remaining four

tanks form a line. The wall of enemy metal rolled toward me. I thought a small amount of retreating would be in order.

The enemy tanks began closing in on me. I had the pedal to the metal, but they were still catching up. I flipped my sighting periscope to the rear and saw all four tanks aiming their main guns at me. It didn't take a rocket scientist (or even a tank scientist) to figure out what they were planning. They were going to unleash all four of their guns at once.

I'd been lucky so far. But I knew this big bucket of bolts I was treading along in could only take so much. "Waiter, check please!" I shouted as I flipped open the top of the tank. "I believe this is my stop. Porter, could you get my luggage?" I leaped out—just as all four enemy tanks fired! *That was a close one!*

I stuck to a nearby tree using my suction-cup feet and watched as the four shells ripped into my tank, reducing it to a pile of scrap metal. *Lights! Camera! War!* I thought. I realized that I, too, would have been pulverized into as many pieces as *Saving Private Ryan* had Oscar nominations if I had remained inside that tank.

I dropped to the ground and was face-to-face with a huge enemy soldier. His immense shoulders narrowed down to a pencil-thin waist.

He had a firmly set jaw that was as square as a brick, and his mean-looking eyes stared right at me. As if green were the only color in the world, his uniform and helmet were also the popular color for this fall's army fashion collection.

"And now, presenting the award for the category of Best Performance by a Hideously Ugly Soldier in a Shooting Role . . ." I began, flashing the big guy a grin. "I didn't catch your name, son."

"Ten-hut, soldier!" screamed the enemy. "I'm called the Sarge. And you are now a prisoner of war!"

"I've never been a prisoner of war before," I explained as I readied myself for battle. "How does one dress? Are the black boots and green pants okay? I don't think the boots come in red, but I am checking into it." Then I swiped at the Sarge's feet with a roundhouse tail attack, knocking him to the ground.

"You'll thank me when you're older," I said as I dashed away. But where should I go from here? I had to find the TV that would take me to the next level if I was to make my way through the Media Dimension and rescue Agent Xtra from the evil Rez.

I looked over my shoulder and saw that the Sarge was right on my tail—well, not literally *on* my tail, but he *was* pretty darn close.

"There's no escape, gecko!" he shouted. "I'm the Sarge, and I give the orders in World War II World!"

"Hi! I'm GEX, and I'll be your waiter. No orders just yet, please," I called over my shoulder. "Your table is still being cleared." That's when I turned around and ran right into the front of another of those pesky tanks. Everything went black.

I woke up with a pounding in my head and the soft sound of a harmonica playing in my ears. Glancing around, I realized I was in a wooden barracks, filled with other prisoners. I peered out the window and saw enemy soldiers marching with guns. I also saw a barbed-wire fence and tall guard towers, complete with big guards carrying large guns. I was in a prisoner-of-war camp.

In the corner of the barracks, one prisoner was bouncing a rubber ball against the wall over and over again. "What time does Colonel Hogan get back?" I asked. "I have to send an important message to the front . . . or is it the side? Anyway, the message is as follows: *Get me out of here!*"

The mournful, whining melody of the harmonica was coming from a scruffy soldier who sat on the dirty wooden floor of the barracks, leaning against his bed. He stopped playing and asked, "Where you from, kid?"

"Originally?" I replied. "Hawaii. But I've moved around quite a bit. If you'd like the full story, I can give it to you, although I'd rather not stick around long enough to fill you in."

"Yup," he replied, then he went back to his harmonica.

"And the Grammy for Best Harmonica Solo by a Prisoner of War in a Black-and-White World War II Movie goes to—" I was interrupted by the sound of the barracks door slamming open. The Sarge barreled in.

"All right, listen up, prisoners," he bellowed. "There has never been a successful escape from Stalag 52, and I trust there won't be any foolish attempts now. Got that, gecko?"

"Are you talking to me?" I asked. "You talking to me? 'Cause I don't see anyone else here. Except, of course, for him and him and him and—"

"Stow it, gecko!" the Sarge boomed. "I'd just better find all of you right here when we call roll for dinner."

"Nothing I like better than a nice dinner roll," I said as the Sarge slammed the door shut. "Unless it's escaping from a POW camp. Who's with me on this?"

Ball Bouncer continued to toss his ball against the wall, while Harmonica Boy kept on wailing. Everyone else turned back to their comic books,

magazines, or letters from home. This looked as if it would be a one-gecko operation.

I scurried into a dark corner, pulled up a few wooden floorboards, and began digging in the dirt below. When my fellow prisoners saw how quickly I was making progress, they suddenly showed interest. Soon they were helping me hide the dirt from my dug tunnel under their beds, in their foot lockers, and in tiny piles around the barracks. That night, we would make our break.

After a lovely dinner of cold potatoes and warm water—and no dinner rolls, as promised—I led the others as we slipped into the tunnel. I emerged from the other end of the tunnel into the darkness just beyond the barbed-wire fence. I was at the edge of a woods.

Suddenly spotlights sliced through the night. They were all pointing at me. "Hello, POW camp. Thank you for coming out to the show tonight. For my first number, I'd like to play a little tune called 'Escape.' It goes something like this!"

I bolted from the tunnel as the guards opened fire. My fellow prisoners followed me into the woods. Some made it. Others didn't. I lashed my tongue up to the top branch of a tall tree, wrapped it around, then pulled myself to safety just as a barrage of bullets shattered the base of the tree.

The tree started to fall with me on top. That's when I spotted the glowing blue TV screen on a high branch of the next tree. "Sorry, guys, this movie is over!" I leaped into the screen just before my tree crashed to the ground.

I found myself at the wheel of a 1930's gangster-type sedan, driving down a crowded big-city street. I had traded my army fatigues for a navy blue, double-breasted, pinstriped suit, shiny black leather shoes, a black shirt, a white tie, and a white, wide-brimmed hat, which was cocked slightly to the side. A toothpick dangled from my mouth.

Just call me Gangster GEX!

Seated to my right was my favorite girl. Her bright red lips shone like two Twizzlers in the midday sun as she chewed her gum. Her platinum

blonde hair, the color of which had been sitting in a bottle not more than an hour ago, gleamed and curled. She wore a long, slinky dress covered with sequins and a feather boa around her neck.

"Where we goin', Gexie?" she asked in a high, squeaky voice that made fingernails on a chalkboard sound soothing.

"Hey, fuggettaboutit, Dollface," I told her, keeping one hand on the wheel and adjusting the angle of my hat with the other. "I got a meetin' with Lenny Mobster. We gotta discuss dividing up the north territory between my mob and his. Right now, he's got seventy-five percent. I'd like to change that split. Otherwise I'm gonna have to find him a pair of concrete shoes to wear. Know what I mean, Dollface?"

"Sure, Gexie," Dollface squealed.

"Then you also know that I can't take you with me to dis here meetin'," I continued, shifting the toothpick over to the other side of my mouth.

"Aw, Gexie, honey, I wanna come with you," she whined.

"Sorry, Dollface," I said as I pulled my big sedan over to the curb. "Business first. Fun later." I got out of the car, walked around to the passenger's side, and opened her door.

Screeeeech! Rata-tata-tata-tata!

Tires squealed as a black sedan whipped around the corner. Two mugs hung from the windows, firing their guns in my general direction.

"Run, Dollface!" I yelled. She ran. I quickly ducked behind the car, expecting my attackers to return. Sure enough, Lenny Mobster's mugs came tearing back down the street.

Machine-gun bullets ripped the finish off my beautiful sedan—not to mention the chrome and the windshield. *I just got 'er waxed, too!* Still, my gleaming hunk of Detroit metal was all that stood between me and a one-way ticket to that big speakeasy in the sky.

I glanced at the car coming down the street. Vicious Vito was behind the wheel. Perfect. I never liked him anyway. I lined the car up carefully with my eyes as it made its way toward me. "I've got them in my sights now, Miss Moneypenny," I muttered to no one in particular. Then I shot a gelatinous tongue lash toward the speeding car. My slippery green slime covered the street. The car hit the slime and skidded out of control, crashing right into the front of Vinnie the Face's betting parlor. Bea-u-tee-ful!

And that's when one of Lenny's goons whacked me on the noggin with the butt of his revolver. Little tweety birds flew around in a circle above my aching head. "I tawt I taw a

mobster goon," I said. "I did! I did!" Then I slumped to the ground.

I started to come out of it slowly but instantly wished I was still unconscious. "Waiter, a new head, please," I mumbled. Pain shot from my forehead to the back of my neck, then did a little tap dance across my skull. Both sides of my head felt like temples of doom, but Dr. Jones was nowhere in sight. "Throw me the idol, I'll throw you the whip!"

I heard a dull rumbling. At first, I thought it was a track from the latest Spice Girls album, but then I knew it couldn't be. It had a much better melody.

Then it struck me—*ow!* Bad choice of words. I realized I couldn't see. "I'm blind!" I screamed. My shout was muffled, as if I was in a tiny enclosed area. I tried to sit up and *whack!* I slammed my head into something hard. "Pain factor eight, Mr. Sulu. Engage."

I felt around in the darkness and touched something round and rubbery. *A tire!* I thought. Next to the tire was a long metal pipe. *A tire jack!* That's when I it hit me—*ooh.* Again, bad choice of words. "My skull, she's gonna blow, Captain, and we're all out of dilithium headache pills!"

I finally figured out that I was in the trunk of a moving car. That explained the dull rumbling.

I was on my way to a face-to-face confrontation with Lenny Mobster, no doubt. So it looked as if our little meeting was going to take place after all. *I've got to talk to him about his invitations, though. A little card in the mail would have been just fine.*

"Today on *Gexie Stewart's Living*—how to make your own invitations out of that clear wrapper that comes on slices of American cheese. It's a good thing!"

The car came to an abrupt stop, slamming my already throbbing head into the spare tire. *It's the new, improved GEX—now with super, brain-splitting headache action!* The trunk popped open, and daylight flooded the compartment, blinding me for a second. When my eyes refocused, I wished they hadn't. I was staring up into the ugly mugs of Frankie the Fish and Lefty Louie.

"Fish, Lefty," I mumbled. "Long time no see. Not long enough, though. Well, I'll just be going now." I climbed from the trunk. "I'm late. They've asked me to present the Mobster of the Year Award down at the Fifty-fourth Precinct, and you know how those coppers hate to be kept waiting."

"You ain't goin' nowhere, gecko," growled Lefty. "Except where we're takin' you—to see Lenny Mobster."

"Lenny? What a surprise!" I cried with my best fake enthusiasm. "And I thought this was just a reunion of our license plate shop group from Alcatraz. Silly me."

"Dead you, if you don't shut up!" Frankie the Fish said. "Let's go. Lenny's waiting."

Each mug took one of my arms and dragged me into a nearby alley. I recognized the place. It was smack in the middle of Lenny's territory. We maneuvered our way through the twisting concrete maze until we came to a heavy steel door at the back of a building. Lefty knocked hard, three times. A small, eye-level slot in the door slid open.

"Fifteen dead guys walk into a nightclub," Lefty said.

"The coppers arrested your uncle on Tuesday," replied the hairy-knuckled gorilla on the other side of the door.

"Good secret code," I commented.

"Shut up!" said Frankie as the door swung open.

Frankie and Lefty led me downstairs. They opened the door to a small office, then shoved me into a chair. Lenny Mobster was staring down at me.

"Lenny, Lenny, Lenny," I began. "A phone call would have been just fine. In fact, I was on my way to see you when your bulldogs here gave me an entirely unnecessary lift."

Frankie the Fish and Lefty Louie both glared at me.

"Good doggies," I said. "And such shiny coats. What do you feed them, Lenny?"

Lenny ignored my sparkling repartee. "I brung you here to discuss a change in our territories," he explained.

"Lenny, old pal, you're a regular mind reader," I said. "That's exactly what I wanted to see *you* about. I think this seventy-five/twenty-five split is for the birds."

"I couldn't agree more, pal," Lenny replied. "I'm proposing a new arrangement. You give me all your territory, or you stop breathing—permanently."

Now, I was quite fond of breathing. It ranked right up there with eating flies and watching TV.

"Well," Lenny urged. "What's your answer?"

"Do I have to answer in the form of a question?" I asked. "I'll take Tail Time for four hundred, Alex!"

I leaped to my feet and smashed Lenny's desk into a pile of toothpicks with my roundhouse tail attack. Lenny and his goons were stunned for a moment, but they recovered quickly and opened fire. I rolled out of the way, ending up in a corner. From there, I scurried up a wall and across the ceiling.

"Say good-bye, gecko," Lenny hissed.

"'Good-bye, gecko.' Okay, now what?" I asked. "How about this!" I said, before Lenny could answer. I let loose with a gelatinous tongue lash. Green slime shot in all directions. "Casting call for *The Exorcist, Part Twelve,* right this way!"

The three goons were covered in the sticky, slimy green goo. Their guns wouldn't fire, and their feet were stuck to the floor. I took advantage of the moment, scampering across the ceiling and down another wall. Then I kicked open a door on the far side of the room.

Stepping through the door, I spotted a giant TV screen. As this was the 1930s and TV didn't exist yet, I knew that this had to be my ticket out of Gangster World.

"Too bad, Lenny," I called back into the office as the mobster struggled with the green goo. "This could have been the beginning of a beautiful friendship." Then I jumped into the TV screen and disappeared to safety.

The sound of thundering hooves was deafening, and the crowd in the stands was a blur. Yet one thing was for sure. I was moving—and fast! I looked around and saw that I was standing in a narrow chariot, bouncing along on large wooden wheels. In my hands, I tightly gripped the reins of my team of horses. On my head sat a metal helmet with wings like the god Mercury's extending off each side. Leather armor covered my chest, and a skirt—a lovely pleated number—hung from my waist.

"I am a manly man!" I shouted to the guys in the chariots on either side of me. They laughed and raced on ahead, leaving me in the dust.

I was Gladiator GEX in Roman World, the next level on my way to finding Rez and Agent Xtra. "Hey, guys! Where are you going?" I shouted after the other Roman soldiers in the chariot race. "I am Gexicus, hero of Rome. Now eat *my* dust!"

I urged my team of horses on. Somehow I sensed that winning this race would bring me one step closer to finding the next level and locating Rez.

As I caught up to the chariot in front of me and pulled alongside it, I starting waving frantically, pointing at the other driver. "Excuse me, great Roman warrior-type guy!" I shouted. "But your shoelace is untied!"

"I beg your pardon?" he replied. "What is a shoelace?"

I looked down at his feet and saw that he was wearing sandals. Shoelaces wouldn't be invented for a thousand more years.

"Pardon me, O great soldier and chariot racer supreme," I called back. "What I meant was that your sandal is untied."

"Oh, dear," he said, looking with great concern at his feet. "That's different."

And that's when I made my move. I leaped from my chariot to his, landing firmly with my suction-cup feet. Chariot Boy was still staring at his sandals, trying to figure out what "untied" meant,

when I whacked him with my roundhouse tail attack. "My tail says hello!" I shouted as he flew from the chariot. "And I say good-bye!"

As I jumped back into my chariot, I saw him roll to a stop. *One down!* I thought. *If they're all this dumb, I should be fine!*

One by one, I gained on the other chariot racers. I passed Goofus Moronus, then Biggus Nosus, and finally I pulled up next to the leader, Uglius Maximus.

"You cannot pass me, young upstart!" Uglius Maximus shouted. He urged his horses on. I kept pace, stride for stride.

"Hey, Uglius!" I called. "Is that your head, or have you grown a big, repulsive pimple on your shoulders?"

The lug got so enraged that he lost control of his chariot. I zipped past him, shouting, "Will the last one to leave the coliseum please turn out the lights?"

I crossed the finish line to the rousing cheers of the Roman crowd. Then I vaulted from my chariot and trotted around in a victory lap for my adoring fans. "Thank you, thank you very much," I said. I waved at my audience, as they continued to cheer. *They sure are excited about a little old race,* I thought. "Come on, stop, please. I don't deserve this. Well, actually, I do!"

My trot around the coliseum ended right in front of Caesar's reviewing stand. The Emperor of Rome, Julius Caesar, stepped down to shake my hand. Then he raised my arm up over my head in a victory sign. "Careful," I warned him as my arm shot up into the air. "Deodorant hasn't been invented yet." This didn't seem to faze him.

"The winner and new greatest champion of Rome," Caesar announced. "Gexicus!"

The crowd went wild again. I was beginning to get bored. "So, Caesar, I'll take a salad—hold the anchovies! Ha, ha! Just kidding. But seriously, Julie, baby," I said to the ruler of all of Rome. "What does a hero get around here for winning this race and becoming the greatest champion of Rome?"

"You, Gexicus, get the honor of fighting and defeating the Cyclops who has been terrorizing our citizens," Caesar replied.

"Great!" I said. "So my prize for winning is—*what?*" I shrieked as I realized what he had just said. "Now let me get this straight. I win, so I get to fight the Cyclops?"

"Of course," replied Caesar. "Only our greatest champion can defeat the terrible creature. He eats people, you know. Geckos, too."

"So if I had lost that race, I wouldn't have to fight him, right?" I asked.

"That is correct," Caesar said.

"Do over!" I cried. "Foul. Two free throws. Can we run this race again?"

"Of course not," Caesar said. "Now go and defeat the Cyclops, or I will feed you to the lions."

I marched slowly from the coliseum, trying to think of a way out of this. But once again, defeating an enemy and moving on to the next world appeared to be the only way to rescue Agent Xtra.

When I reached the edge of town, the Cyclops was waiting. "Hey, you!" I shouted up to the gruesome beast before me. "You! Tall, bald, and one-eyed! *I'm* walking here, okay?"

The twelve-foot-tall Cyclops roared in disapproval.

"I'm sorry, auditions for the MGM lion closed—about sixty years ago!" I replied, forgetting that this was a couple of thousand years before movies were even invented.

The Cyclops picked up a boulder the size of a small car and heaved it toward me.

"It's tail time!" I cried as I stepped to the side and drew my tail back. "Paging Mr. McGwire, Mr. Mark McGwire!" *Thwack!* I swung my tail like a baseball bat and smacked the boulder, sending it back in a hard line drive, right at the Cyclops' midsection. Old One-Eye caught the boulder in his chest, wrapping his arms around it. The impact

sent him flying into the side of a mountain. But he came charging back, twice as mad.

"You're the designated hitter," I announced. "And here's the designated hit!" *Wham!* I whacked him across the knee with my roundhouse tail attack. "I'm swingin' for the fences, baby, and it's déjà-ouch for you all over again! By the way, I'm famous for this!"

The Cyclops fell to the ground, tumbling over and over like a big, bald, out-of-control gymnast. "A 9.4, a 9.3, a 9.3, and a 4.6 from the Greek judge," I said, raising my hands high.

By this time, the crowd from the coliseum had gathered. A chant rose from the assembled Romans. "Here we go, Gexie, here we go!" *Clap! Clap!* "Here we go, Gexie, here we go!" *Clap! Clap!*

I turned and bowed to my adoring fans. Big mistake! The Cyclops was quicker than he appeared. While my back was turned, he sneaked over, picked me up, and tossed me onto the mountainside.

"There you go, Gexie, there you go!" *Clap! Clap!* "There you go, Gexie, there you go!" *Clap! Clap!*

I crashed into a stand of trees and tumbled to the ground. I was high up on the side of the mountain. As I looked down, I could see the Cyclops laughing and pointing at me. Then I looked up and spotted a way out of this mess.

I scrambled down the mountain and stood at its base, taunting the giant monster. "Seen any good movies lately—in 1-D?" I shouted. "Why don't you wear a monocle? Then I can call you 'Two-Eyes'!"

The Cyclops was furious. He charged right at me. Fortunately most of the people got out of the way in time. A hush fell over the crowd.

I waited for just the right second, then walloped the ground at the base of the mountain with a powerful tail slam. "Gotta love that tail, baby!" I shouted as the ground rumbled and the mountain shook from the impact.

The many boulders I had seen when I was up on the mountainside came tumbling down in a stony avalanche. "Exit, stage left!" I dashed to safety just as the pile of rocks buried the Cyclops.

The crowd cheered once again. "Gexicus beat Cyclops, yes he did!" *Clap! Clap!*

"Enough with that stuff already!" I shouted, but my fans kept on chanting.

Well, that takes care of Gruesome, I thought. *But it doesn't get me any closer to Rez.*

Suddenly the Cyclops' single eye came floating out of the pile of rubble. The crowd gasped. I watched in amazement as the eye transformed into a TV screen.

"Well, there's my ride," I announced. "Gotta go. It's been nice saving your civilization. Hey, there's no audience like a Roman audience. See ya, Caesar. You know, I never *did* get that salad."

I turned and leaped into the TV screen.

I tumbled through the bizarre darkness that always accompanied a trip from one world to another in the Media Dimension. When I opened my eyes, I thought I was dreaming. I was standing on top of a huge electronic billboard, looking out at a futuristic city of tall, gleaming buildings. Far below me, the people and cars that moved along the streets looked like ants scurrying back to their anthills.

But the most astonishing sight I witnessed came when I looked up. The sky was filled with flying robots! They looked like 757s with arms, legs, and faces—ugly faces at that!

Then I caught a glimpse of myself in the

reflective surface of a building in front of me. I looked like a robot, too! My arms and legs were encased in mechanical armor that bent at the elbows and knees. My tail—my best defensive weapon—was protected by bendable, jointed armor, as well. A tall helmet sat on my head, with an opening big enough only for my face. *At least they didn't cover my gorgeous mug with one of those reject Halloween faces the flying robots wear.* And that's when I realized that in this world I must be a flying robot, also! *Nice costume,* I thought. *But what if I have to go potty?*

I spread my mechanical wings and leaped from the billboard. "I'm Robo-GEX!" I shouted. "Bartender, set me up with a pint—of 40-weight oil!" That's when I heard the strange but familiar voice coming through the built-in headphones inside my helmet.

"GEX," the voice ordered, "turn around."

I fired the retro-rockets off the top of my helmet and came to a midair stop. My boot rockets enabled me to hover there as I spun around to face the giant video billboard I'd been standing on. There he was, about a thousand times bigger than life—Rez! His hideous metallic face filled the giant screen.

"You are taking too long, GEX," Rez said in a static-filled hiss.

I tapped the outside of my helmet. "Hello?" I said. "Very poor reception. What's the matter, Rezzie, don't you folks in the Media Dimension have direct cable modems? I get a cleaner signal when I download the latest video game codes."

"I'm here to help you, GEX," Rez continued, "to help you find your friend."

The picture on the video billboard pulled back from a tight close-up. Now I could see all of Rez. I also caught sight of Agent Xtra dangling helplessly from Rez's sharp metallic claw.

My cold blood turned hot. "Why don't you just go to my favorite web site, Rez? It's *www.i'm_gonna_demolish_you.com!*"

"You're taking too long," Rez repeated. "I'm growing impatient waiting for our final showdown. That's why I'm here, cutting through the levels to help you."

I stared at Agent Xtra, then looked at Rez. "I'm listening," I said.

"You are in Anime World," Rez explained. "Go to the Secret Robot Hideout. You must defeat the giant robot security guard to get inside. Once inside, you have to battle Mac, the two-legged robot. If you conquer Mac, then the path to me will be revealed."

A million questions raced through my mind. "But what about—?" Too late. The image

of Rez was gone, replaced by a billboard ad for Ono's Repair Shop. *Feeling a bit out of sorts?* the ad read. *Then bring that tired body in for a complete tune-up and lube job. Change your personal body oil every 3,000 miles. You'll be glad you did.*

I jetted away, wondering how I would ever find a place called the Secret Robot Hideout. Then I spotted a large neon sign. It blinked on and off and read *Secret Robot Hideout,* followed by an arrow. Like everything else in the Media Dimension, this made no sense. But who was I to look a gift hideout in the mouth? I jetted straight for the sign, then followed the arrow around to the right.

That's when I first caught sight of him. He stood twenty feet tall, his entire body covered with heavy-duty armor. *This must be the giant robot security guard Rez told me about. He seems well-suited for his chosen career.*

The giant robot stood in front of a huge metal fortress. *I guess with a security guard like Tiny over here, it's okay to advertise your "secret" hideout.* I zoomed down and landed in front of the guard. "Delivery. I've got a double order of sushi, well done, for Mac," I announced. "So if you'll just step aside, I'll be going into your impenetrable fortress."

Unfortunately, the giant robot security guard didn't buy my line. His enormous steel neck bent down. He was staring right at me with cold, blank eyes. Then he started transforming. His long arms retracted into his body. He folded in half at the waist until his compact form resembled an enormous flying tank. His legs rotated around to the front of his body, turning into laser cannons. He flew right at me, both barrels unloading sizzling laser fire.

"Shields up, Mr. Chekov!" I cried. And then an amazing thing happened. My own armor reacted instinctively, transforming me into a mini-fighter jet. I was instantly airborne, returning the fire from the two laser blasters that now extended from my arms.

Use the Force, GEX!

Who said that? I looked around, but all I saw was the robot guard flying right at me, lasers sizzling. "I've been saving this just for you, sweetheart," I said as I fired my own laser blasts at the huge flying tank.

Apparently the big guy had better shields than I did. My blasts bounced off him like playful insults in a TV sitcom about a bunch of friends who hang out and—*blam!*

Not only were his shields better than mine, his weapons were, too!

I was hit and losing altitude fast. Down I plummeted like the ratings of a TV sitcom about a bunch of friends who hang out and—*crash!*

I hit the ground hard. I tried to fire my boot rockets to get airborne again, but they had been destroyed in the crash. I couldn't get back into the air. The robot guard landed about ten feet away from me. I watched helplessly as he transformed himself into a giant tractor, then came rolling toward me.

I'll be crushed like a gecko pancake if I don't do something fast! I thought. Then I remembered that I, too, was a transforming robot in this world. My metal limbs started folding and changing. Within seconds, I had transformed into a helicopter. I knew I couldn't fly with my boot rockets broken, but that's not what I had in mind.

As the tractor came closer, I flipped over onto my side so that my tail blade—the body part formerly known as my tail—was facing the approaching vehicle. My armored tail spun with the speed of a blender making a milkshake.

"Watch out, you oversized hunk of metal!" I shouted. "I'm gonna tear you to pieces!" Just then the tractor hit my tail and began to shred. "Gecko chop, yeah, baby! I'm gonna have to start calling you *Blade Runner,* 'cause it's helicopter tail time!"

The giant robot was now reduced to scattered bits of scrap metal. I transformed back to my regular armored body as the ruins of the robot lay smoldering around me. Suddenly I heard a beeping.

"Excuse me, pal, that's my beeper," I said. "Probably my agent. Ah, Hollywood's calling at last. Maybe I can get you a role as a trash compactor or a minivan." I felt around in my armor. "Dang, I must have left my beeper in my other set of transforming armor. Maybe it's my shoe phone." I pulled my boot off. "Hello, Chief? Chief? No, not my shoe."

A loud announcement boomed from the robot's head—which was no longer attached to his large body. "Ten seconds to self-destruct," came the mechanical voice.

"Pulling the old self-destruct trick, eh?" I asked. "You've been watching too many *Star Trek* episodes. And if I don't do something fast, I'll have watched my last TV show. What a sad thought."

"Five seconds to self-destruct."

"It's transforming time!" I shouted, quickly changing into a forklift. I rolled over to the robot's head, picked it up, and rocked backward on my wheels, tossing the head to the front door of the hideout. "Let's kick things up a notch!"

Bam!

The robot's head exploded, tearing a gaping hole in the front of the hideout. Changing back to my original armored body, I dashed inside.

The hideout was like a metal beehive, with drone robots buzzing around, busy at their assigned tasks. Guard drones raced toward me. Swinging my powerful armor-encased tail from left to right, I knocked them casually aside as I moved through the hideout. "File this under *Outta my way,* boys! I'm on a mission!"

I finally reached the main room at the center of the hideout. Floating in midair was a robot that looked like a miniature Death Star with legs—no arms, no head, just a round metallic body and two legs dangling from the bottom.

"Let me guess," I said. "You're Mac, the big robot boss. My name's Bond. James Bond."

Mac didn't say a word. Maybe he believed me. Maybe not. He fired an infrared, wide-angle light beam that smashed me into the wall.

"Now cut that out!" I shouted. "Okay, enough of this high-tech laser stuff. If you want to get rid of a robot, you've got to do it the old-fashioned way—with a bucket of water!"

I instantly transformed into a huge metal bucket. My arms and legs stuck out from the sides and bottom of the bucket. I rushed over to a nearby water cooler and filled myself up. Then I

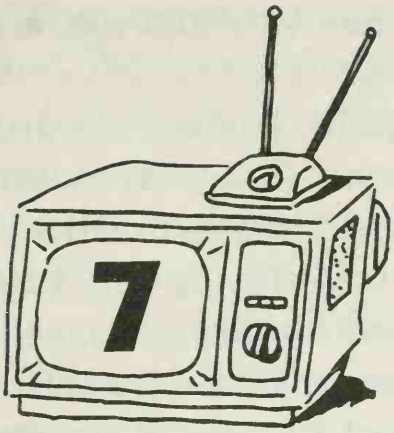
scrambled back to Mac and tossed the water onto his headless, armless Death Star body.

Sparks shot everywhere, and thick red smoke poured from Mac, filling the room. "I'm melting! Melting!" Mac squealed in a tinny, metallic voice. Then he was silent.

When the smoke cleared, I looked down. I was no longer a bucket. In fact, my metal armor was completely gone. I was regular old GEX again. In front of me sat a shiny new secret spy space shuttle.

This must be what Rez meant when he said that the way to reach him would be revealed if I defeated Mac, I thought. I jumped into the ship and powered it up. Then I flipped on the navigational computer. The way to Rez's space station was already programmed in.

"He *wants* me to find him!" I muttered. "This whole adventure has been one big tease. Okay, Rezzie, old boy. Invitation accepted. Only I'm not bringing a nice bakery product to your space station. I'm bringing my tail . . . and it's gonna be déjà-ouch all over again!"



The ship knew the way to Rez's space station all by itself. Rez was sending for me. I was on my way to the final showdown—and this time it was personal!

I zoomed past the many worlds of the Media Dimension. I saw a vampire in Monster World *(where's Buffy when you need her?)*, an evil-looking Santa in Twisted North Pole World *(your jolly days are over, present man)*, a dude who looked like Sherlock Holmes in Clue World *(elementary, my dear Xtra, the game is afoot...or is it a leg?)*, cowboys in Spaghetti Western World *(Xtra, I'm a-fixin' to rescue you)*, and pirates in

Pirates of the Sea World *(arrgh, lass, I'll be savin' ye any time now).*

A bright light flashed all around me. The ship strained as if it was passing through a barrier of some kind. When I emerged on the other side, I was out in the vast blackness of space . . . *the final frontier. This is the voyage of the space shuttle* Gexer-prise. *It's three-game mission: to seek out weird TV rejects, strange enemies, and wacky costumes—to blindly go where no gecko has gone before!*

The ship plunged through the star-filled darkness. I put my feet up on the dashboard and sat back to enjoy the ride. It didn't last long. A red light on the dash began to blink on and off. *Wouldn't it be just like Rez to give me a ship that ran out of gas?* But it wasn't the fuel light that was blinking. The light indicated that we were approaching a large object in space. Either Scotty was floating nearby, or Rez's space station was looming through the front window ahead of me.

It was the station, and it was huge. It looked like a giant gyroscope spinning in space. If I knew Rez, and I certainly did, that station was heavily protected by a tight defensive network—kind of like CBS during a bad ratings week.

I spotted a cluster of satellites orbiting around the space station. I coasted over to them and

flipped on the ship's sensors. I was sitting outside the space station's defensive shield. If I tried to fly my ship past the shield, I knew it would be detected. Therefore, I'd have to travel the rest of the way on paws. "Gecko Airlines departing immediately, with stops on that satellite, that satellite, and that satellite. Final destination—Rez's space station. Please make sure your tail is in the upright position!"

I leaped from the secret spy space shuttle and landed on the first satellite. My suction-cup feet gripped the smooth, round metallic surface. *That's one,* I thought. *Only twelve more to go.* One by one I leapfrogged (or should I say I "leap-geckoed"?) from satellite to satellite. I knew that Rez's defenses would detect something as large as the space shuttle. But I was hoping that something as small as me could slip through undetected. I was going to find out.

I stood poised on the last satellite. It was a long jump from there to the space station. Somewhere between the satellite and the station, I would pass through the defensive shield. "Lock and load, little lizard," I shouted. "I am outta here!" Of course, in space no one can hear you scream.

I passed through the defensive shield undetected. That's when I started to lose altitude. I never lose attitude, of course, but in this case I

was drifting down, away from the space station. *Open the pod bay doors, Hal. Hal? Hal?*

I reacted swiftly, firing my tongue at an outside railing on the station. Wrapping it securely around the railing, I pulled myself over to the station and caught my balance. Then I scurried along on my suction-cup feet until I came to a door.

It can't be this easy, I thought. *A door right here, leading into the station?* Of course, I was right. It wasn't that easy. I reached out to open the door and was repelled away from the station by a force field. With a snap of my tongue, I pulled myself back and regained my footing. *A force field, huh? It must be powered by an energy generator. But where is that? And where's Scotty when I need him?*

I continued around the circular station and spotted a series of three solar arrays, one stacked above the other. They obviously took in solar energy from the nearby sun and sent it to the energy generators, which converted it into electrical energy, which was used to power the force field, which protected the door to the space station that Rez built. And I was the gecko who was going to stop the solar collectors that pulled in the energy, which powered the force field, which protected the door to the space station that Rez built. Phew! The only question was, how?

The solution was elementary, my dear Gexie. I had to keep energy from reaching the generators. I scrambled along the outer railing until I came to the first collector. There, in the back of the giant dish, was a large switch labeled *On/Off. Let's see,* I thought, *on/off, on/off. I got it. Turn the stupid switch* off!

"And now, representing the Olympic Lizard Gymnastic Team—GEX!" I vaulted onto the edge of the collector's dish and grabbed hold with my front paws. Going into a handstand, I arched my back. "Now lift with the legs, and two and three. Come on, girls, feel the burn!" I whipped my tail right at the on/off switch.

Whack! The switch flipped down to the off position and the solar collector went dark. "We have confirmed a direct hit, general! One down, two to go!"

I looked around for an easy way up to the next collector, which sat about four stories above me. That's when a small elevator platform came zooming up from below. I timed my jump perfectly and landed on the platform, sticking with my suction-cup feet.

"Elevator going up. Which reminds me, do you realize that if Ella Fitzgerald had married Darth Vader, she would have been *Ella Vader?*" The rushing platform continued its climb.

Bing! The elevator chimed as it came to a stop. "Fifth floor—scuba gear, DVD players, and solar collectors. Watch your step getting off!" I jumped from the elevator directly into my handstand and thwacked the second switch with my tail. The collector went dark. One short elevator ride later, I did the same with the third and final collector.

I took the elevator back down to the main door. I reached out and pressed the button to release the door. The force field was off and the door slid open. I hurried into the airlock and heard the outer door close behind me. After a few seconds, the room pressurized, and the door leading inside opened. I was staring into Rez's space station.

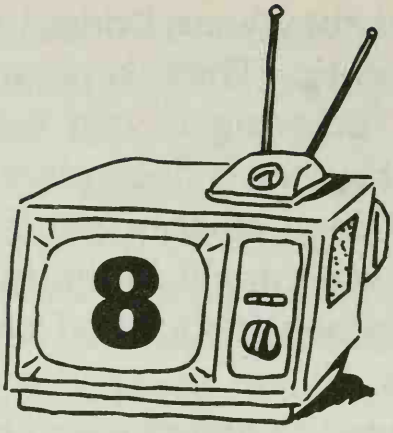
"Houston, the gecko has landed. Now it's lock and load, little lizard!"

I looked around and sized up the place. I think it was a size fifteen extra, extra, extra, extra, extra large. We're talking gigantic here! The interior of the station was made up of a huge circular central tower surrounded by three smaller towers equal distances apart. Each of the three outer towers was connected to the central tower by a narrow bridge. But these were no ordinary bridges. They were not in Madison County, nor were they over the River Kwai. Not one of them was even the bridge of the starship *Enterprise.*

No, instead they were bridges made of static, just like TV static. They kept appearing, then disappearing, flickering in and out of existence. Below each bridge was a deep pit of nothingness—the very worst kind of deep pit, if you ask me. I knew that if I was caught in the middle of one of those bridges when it flickered out, it would be bye-bye, gecko.

I leaped onto the first of the outside towers. As soon as I landed, a long-range missile zipped right past my head, only inches away. "Whoa! Beam me up, Scotty. The Romulans are using cruise missiles. And I never signed up for this cruise!" I glanced at the large central tower. There, in the middle, stood Rez. He floated in a field of static, staring right at me.

"Finally you have made it to the heart of my space station," he said. "Now I can destroy you and your friend at the same time!" Rez stepped aside, revealing the bound and gagged figure of Agent Xtra sitting on the floor behind him!



"Hey! I'm dedicating this rescue to a little lady I like to call Xtra," I crooned. "How ya doin', baby?"

"Hmmirrmirmm!" she replied through her gag.

"Come and get me, GEX," Rez taunted.

"Across one of these disappearing bridges, I suppose?" I shot back. "Perhaps you've mistaken me for one of your thick-headed level bosses, like Lenny Mobster, or the Sarge, or maybe Mac. Well, now you're dealing with GEX, and that's a whole different ball game!"

"And just how do you intend to stop me while I'm wearing this?" Rez asked. A metal plate suddenly appeared, covering his chest.

I looked around the tower and spotted a TV screen on a slightly raised platform. Something was different about it. It didn't look quite like the screens that had transported me from one world to another in the Media Dimension. I jumped right at the screen. Instead of pulling me in, the screen shattered, and out buzzed a fly. I looked across the canyon between the towers at Rez and saw that his metal chest shield was gone. It had disappeared the moment I smashed the TV screen. Then the fly that had zipped out of the screen buzzed right in front of me.

"Pardon my tongue, darling, but it's snack time!" I said, shooting my tongue out and snatching the fly. As soon as I swallowed, I knew that—like the fly that started me on these wacky Media Dimension adventures—*this* was no ordinary fly.

I felt a strange sense of power surge through my entire body. "Now, right cross, and left jab, and punch, and punch, and—wow, this Tae-Bo stuff really works. I've never felt stronger!" Then it struck me—and I don't mean Rez's missile. It was the fly! *Help me! Help me!* The fly I had eaten was some kind of special power-up. *Let's see just what this power-up can do!*

"I'm sorry, Rezzie, old man, what was the question?" I asked. "How will I stop you while

you're wearing *what?* That hood ornament you call a head?"

Rez glanced down at his unprotected chest, then looked back up at me with rage burning in his dull yellow eyes.

"I've been saving this especially for you, Rez!" I shouted. Then I let loose with my gelatinous tongue lash. A stream of green slime jetted from my mouth. Now, let me tell you, I've fired off a few gelatinous tongue lashes in my day, but this one was super-charged. The slime shot from my mouth like a green laser streak, bridging the cavernous gap between the two towers and striking Rez right on his vulnerable chest.

"Stee-rike one!" I shouted. Rez fell backward, disappearing into the pool of TV static.

"All too easy," I muttered in my best Darth Vader voice. "It seems the Emperor has underestimated your powers, young Jedi. I came, I saw, I conquered!"

Well, guess what? I was wrong. Rez reappeared seconds later. At first he was a series of floating static particles. The particles reformed into the shape of Rez, then finally focused back into the fearsome tin can himself. And, by the way, that pesky metal shield was back in place again.

I think this calls for some close-up fighting, I realized. *I'm just going to have to cross the*

disappearing bridges in order to get up close and personal.

I stood at the edge of the outer tower. Looking down, I could see an endless pit of nothingness. The bridge appeared before me, then vanished. *It's now or never!* The next time it appeared, I dashed out onto it, racing as fast as my gecko legs would move.

Almost there, I told myself when I was a third of the way across. *Just a little farther,* I thought when I reached the halfway point, pushing myself. *Run, GEX, run!* Who said that?

When I was two-thirds of the way to Rez's central tower, the bridge disappeared. One second I was running along on solid footing, and the next I was pumping my legs in midair.

I heard Rez's mechanical cackle as I did the only thing I could think of—other than crying. I fired my tongue out, stretching it as far as it would go.

Thwap! My tongue caught the edge of the central tower. The rest of my body followed, slamming my face into the tower. I rolled over three times, then jumped to my feet. "Room service for Mr. Rez. Just sign here."

I swiped at Rez with a roundhouse tail attack. I hit him squarely in the chest, but my tail just bounced off his metal shield. Then it was his turn.

"Now I finish you, gecko," he threatened. "You have been nothing but a constant irritant throughout my quest to take over TV."

"Some Preparation H will take care of that irritation right away," I explained helpfully. "Or maybe some powder for the big baby's diaper rash."

"Enough!" Rez screamed. He swiped at me with his right hand. I jumped straight up into the air to dodge the blow. He followed with a left-handed swipe. I ducked out of the way and countered with a tail slam. The massive tower shook from the impact, but Rez held his ground.

"Here," Rez boomed. "Let me show you how it's done." He lifted his huge metal hand over his head, then brought it down hard, using what he called his "hand smash."

The central tower shook violently. I tumbled back onto a bridge that fortunately was there when I landed.

"I'll be Bach," I said to Rez. "But you can be Beethoven!" Then I dashed across the bridge. I reached an outer tower just as the bridge flickered out of sight. *He's invulnerable as long as he's wearing that shield,* I realized. *Gotta smash another TV and hope the shield goes away again!*

I climbed up to the platform high above the outer tower, where I could see another TV screen. A barrage of Rez's long-range missiles headed right

for me. I ducked to my left to avoid one and found myself right in the path of another. I had to jump from the TV platform back down to the tower in order to keep from getting hit. *This is going to be tougher than I thought. I need to get to the TV in order to shut down Rez's chest armor and get my power-up fly. But when I'm up on the TV platform, I'm a sitting gecko—an easy target for Rez's missiles. Gotta be quick and cagey!*

I scooted back up to the TV platform. Missiles soared toward me. I pressed myself against the edge of the platform, hanging my tail out over the edge. I waved it in a big arc. The missiles suddenly changed course, zeroing in on my tail. At the last second, just as the missiles arrived, I pulled my tail back in. The missiles sailed right past the platform.

"It's TV time!" I shouted. I whacked the screen with my tail, and out popped the fly. With a swift *thwap* of my tongue, that little buzzer was mine. Again I felt the power racing through my body. *Hey! This tower gives me an even better view of Rez! And I can see that his chest shield is gone!*

I took aim and was preparing to fire a super-charged gelatinous tongue lash when the next round of missiles headed my way. I leaped off the TV platform and clung to its edge by my fingertips. When the missiles had zipped past, I pulled myself back onto the platform and returned fire.

Splat! A huge stream of gooey green slime spewed from my mouth. The green goo shot across the gap between the outer tower and Rez's central tower, striking him in the chest. Once again, Rez disappeared, de-rezzing into the pool of static.

"Awesome, baby!" I shouted. "I'm just that good!"

But once again, Rez reappeared on his tower, chest shield in place.

"No problem," I said. "I'll just bust another TV screen, gobble down another fly, and zap you in the chest again. Sooner or later, you've got to disappear permanently!" But when I turned around, the TV was gone. I quickly scanned the two other outer towers. No TVs there, either!

"Ha, ha, ha!" Rez's evil laughter filled the space station. "What's the matter, little lizard?" he taunted me. "Someone took your TV away... again? Fool! The TVs only return when you have paid me a visit here on my tower. And I'm waiting!"

So that's the trick, I thought. *I've got to go back to the tower and fight old Rezzie close up so that a new TV will appear. Then I can power up and zap him from long range.*

This time, the bridge to Rez's tower stayed intact long enough for me to scramble over and attempt my roundhouse tail attack again. I leaped up and whacked Rez in the head, figuring that

maybe I'd have better luck if I aimed away from his chest shield.

Slam! I was right. Rez went tumbling backward and disappeared into thin air. "Now *that*, Xtra baby, is how it's done!" I slipped the gag from Agent Xtra's mouth.

"GEX, listen!" Xtra cried. "Rez will be back any minute. You only de-rezzed him temporarily. You've got to hit him in the chest with his shield down a total of five times. Then, and only then, will he de-rez for good. That last whack doesn't count! Do you understand?"

"Yeah, baby," I replied. "I'm taking you with me right now."

"I don't think so," boomed a voice from behind me. Rez, back and in full form, swiped at me with his left hand. I quickly dodged the blow. He followed with a right-handed swipe, which I ducked. Then came a move I hadn't seen before—one that took me by surprise.

Rez spun in place like a top, then swiftly moved toward me. With no defense against Rez's spin attack, I was sent flying off the platform, plunging down into the blackness below.

Cold air rushed past me as I tumbled through the darkness. Above me, I could vaguely see a bridge that had reappeared. I shot out my tongue and caught the bottom of the bridge. Up I zipped, using my tongue like a safety rope. Within seconds, I was on the bridge, racing back to the TV platform on the outer tower.

I reached the TV screen just as a barrage of Rez's missiles came toward me. I ducked to avoid them, then swung off the platform, hanging by my tail.

When all the missiles had passed, I climbed back on the platform and bashed the TV with my tail. I gulped down the buzzing fly that emerged and turned toward Rez to take aim, but I had trouble finding him. His form kept flickering in and out. I figured that each time I hit him he got weaker and weaker. That must be what Agent Xtra was talking about when she said that the fifth hit would de-rez him for good. I waited for his shieldless form to materialize, then fired another gelatinous tongue lash. This time, instead of green slime, a spear of ice flew from my mouth. "New gelatinous tongue lash icicles. Now available in peppermint, winter-green, and subzero frozen shaft!"

The icicle struck Rez squarely in the chest. Once again, he vanished into the static pit.

"Oh, yeah!" I screamed. "Victory dance time!"

I did a little jig, then raced across the bridge, now visible. By this time, I had the routine figured out. Go to the central tower to reset the power-up TVs, then back to an outer tower to smash the TV and eat the fly . . . that is, if the bridge held up and Rez's missiles didn't mow me down!

I reached Rez's tower and untied Xtra's hands. "Hurry," she said. "Do my feet."

"I'm staging a daring rescue and you're thinking about a pedicure?" I asked in amazement.

"I mean *untie* my feet, GEX!" Xtra shouted.

"I knew that," I replied. "Just testing you."

That's when Rez reappeared. He didn't look so well. Not that he ever would have won a beauty contest, but now his form was faint. It flickered in and out of focus, as if he was struggling to stay alive. This round, he wasted no time with hand swipes. He went right into his spin attack and knocked me from the tower.

I plunged into the darkness once again. But now I knew to stay close to the side of Rez's tower—close enough to reach out and stick to it with my suction-cup feet. Then came the long climb back up. By the time I reached the top, a bridge had reappeared. I leaped onto the bridge and raced back to the outer tower. Rez spotted me and fired a missile. I couldn't dodge it or outrun it, so I did the one thing I could think of—I jumped onto it, straddling the missile like a cowboy riding a bucking bronco.

"Yee-ha! Ride 'em cowboy!" I shouted as I grabbed hold of the nose of the missile and steered it toward the TV screen on the platform above the outer tower. The missile, with me on it, smashed right through the entire TV and kept going. The fly popped out, and I snagged it with a quick flick of my tongue. Then I took the nose of the missile with both hands and steered it around in a long arc. The missile and I were now headed

back toward Rez. Again, his protective shield was gone. "I'm a-givin' you three seconds to git out of town, pardner. This space station ain't big enough for the both of us."

I reached his tower and leaped off, landing next to Agent Xtra. The missile struck Rez right in the chest and exploded on impact.

Now, maybe it was because Rez had created the missile, or maybe it was just bad luck, but not only didn't the missile harm Rez, it actually seemed to give him strength. His body looked more together than it had at any point since I'd started using his chest for target practice.

Rez loomed over me. "You have returned a great source of power to me," he snarled. "For that, I thank you. And to show my appreciation, I will crush the life out of you before I toss you off the tower."

"Awfully decent of you, Rezzie, old boy," I replied as his steely fingers tightened around my neck and he lifted me off the ground. "You're a regular humanitarian. Or should I say a 'gecko-tarian'?"

I drew as deep a breath as possible, then opened my mouth and shot my tongue at Rez's chest. This time, fire poured from my mouth. Rez vanished, and I dropped to the floor.

"Finish untying me, GEX!" Xtra demanded.

"Oh, you behave," I said as I raced back across the bridge. "That's four," I shouted back to Xtra over my shoulder. "I've got to power up once more and put an end to that metallic nightmare."

I reached the TV tower with no problem this time. Rez was taking longer and longer to recover from each blow. I smashed the TV and ate the fly. The bridge flickered in and out a few times during my return trip to Rez's tower but remained stable enough for me to make it back. When Rez finally reappeared, I was ready.

The moment he was clearly visible, I struck Rez in the chest with my ultimate gelatinous tongue lash. Green slime spread throughout his system.

"No!" he screamed as he began to fade from view. "GEX, listen to me," he said in a voice growing weaker with each word. "There is another."

"Another?" I asked in surprise.

"Another boss," he whispered. "A bigger boss than me. You may have defeated me, but this isn't over yet!"

Rez began to self-destruct. His image flickered, growing more faint, until he faded away into the static of the rez pit. He was gone—for good.

"It's over for *me,* pal," I replied, realizing that I had just destroyed the creature who had once been my father. My thoughts were brought back to the present, as Agent Xtra yanked on my tail.

"Untie me and let's get out of here, Gexie!" she insisted.

The tower began to shake. Explosions ripped through the space station all around us. "I guess old Rezzie's taking the station with him," I said.

"And us, too, if we don't move fast!" Xtra pointed out.

I untied her remaining ropes, then looked around for a way out. "My secret spy space shuttle is docked just outside the main door," I explained. "Come with me."

I helped Xtra off the tower and over to the door leading out of the station. The three outer towers that had been home base during my battle with Rez shattered into pieces, falling into the black nothingness below. I pulled open the door and stepped outside—

—just in time to see my space shuttle explode. "Oh, man, I just *got* that ship, too!" I said. "I didn't even get a chance to put my *Honk if you love TV* bumper sticker on the rear heat shield."

"So how are we going to get out of here now, Rescue Boy?" Xtra asked.

"In *that!*" I shouted, pointing at a huge space blimp docked nearby.

Xtra grabbed on to my tail. "Hang on tight," I said. Then I leaped through space toward the blimp. Using my suction-cup feet, I grabbed hold

of the door leading into the blimp's control room. We slipped inside, released the docking clamps, and headed away from the doomed space station.

"Not a bad rescue, if I do say so myself," I remarked.

"We're still not home yet, Gexie," Xtra replied. "But thanks for saving me."

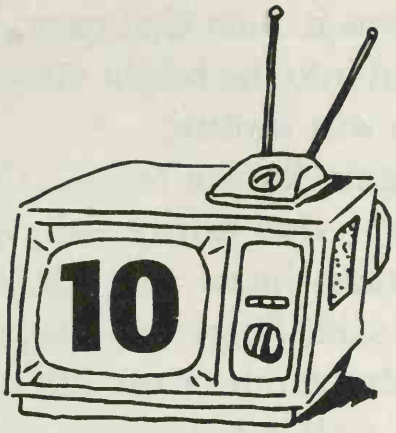
"Hey, what's a Bond without his Moneypenny?" I asked. "A Steed without his Mrs. Peel? A Jethro without his Ellie Mae?"

And that's when the space station exploded in a final blazing fireball. The wall of flames shot toward us.

"Do something, Gexie!" Xtra screamed.

"We can't outrun the fire in this giant Macy's balloon," I explained, screaming back as calmly as I could. "Brace yourself. Here it comes!"

The fireball hit with ferocious impact. Our blimp instantly ripped apart. Everything went black.



I felt the sensation of falling, then suddenly I landed. I opened my eyes and saw that Xtra and I were safely seated on my living room floor in my very own house in Hawaii. I looked up at the big-screen TV. James Bond was battling Dr. No. I was finally home.

"You okay?" I asked as Xtra and I got to our feet.

"Never better," she replied, giving me a small kiss on the top of my head. "I gotta go, Gexie."

"So soon?" I asked.

She nodded.

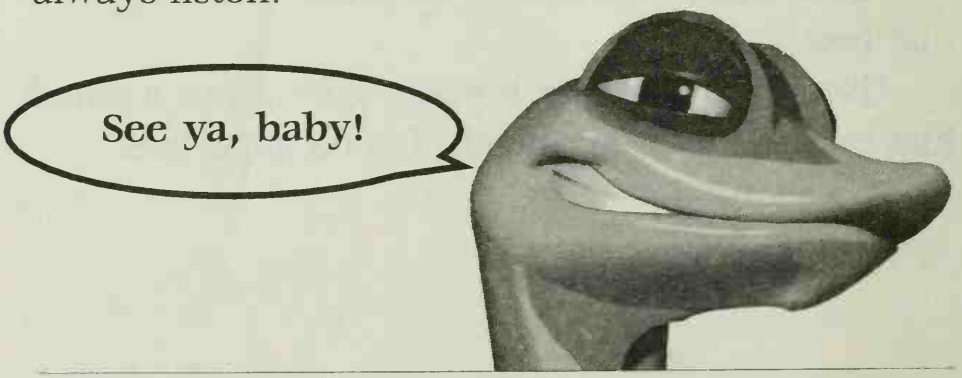
And that was it. Just that easy, just that quick, she stepped out into the bright Hawaiian sunshine. A stretch limo was waiting.

"Thanks again for the rescue, Gexie," she said, winking at me in that funny little way she had.

"We'll always have the Media Dimension, sweetheart," I said. Then she disappeared into the backseat and drove out of my life once again.

As for me, well, what else? I plopped down in front of my big-screen TV with a bowlful of flies and my beloved remote and started doing what I do best (other than rescuing damsels in distress from the Media Dimension, that is). I began flipping through the channels.

I thought about Rez for a second, and wondered whether I'd seen the last of him. Then I hit upon my favorite *Gilligan's Island* rerun. You know, the one where Gilligan does something stupid and the Skipper gets all upset? Then Maryanne walks in and...well, you know the story. I've gotta go. The big screen is calling me, and I always listen.



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